On Saturday, September 25th, Kristin Speth of UW-Madison delivered a talk in Mineral Point as part of the Cornish Festival celebration. Her talk examined the presence of the Cornish in the Mineral Point area and ways the Cornish dialect has influenced the speech in that part of the state. It is said that the Cornish dialect was so commonly heard, that later generations learned this accent, regardless of what accent their ancestors had. For example, a grandchild of Norwegian immigrants might say "tarrible" instead of "terrible" or "'ello" instead of "hello," on the influence of Cornish English. This phenomenon is what linguists call Founder Effect. Kristin's talk examined the audio record to try to trace the Cornish dialect in Mineral Point.

Written accounts, such as Louis A. Copeland's 1898 article "The Cornish in southwest Wisconsin," describe the significance of Cornish immigrants in the early settlement of the region. These accounts also often relate words and pronunciations that were unique to the Cornish immigrants.

In the 1940s, decades after immigration, researcher Helene Stratman-Thomas recorded some of the children of these Cornish immigrants as they told jokes and stories in the Cornish dialect. These stories were passed on from one generation to another, and though these stories were told about 100 years after immigration from Cornwall ended, they still preserved features that the audience would appreciate as being "Cornish."

Eventually the Cornish dialect was replaced by a regional American dialect, known as Upper Midlands, a dialect not typical of Wisconsin. The Wisconsin State Historical Library has many later recordings of interviews that contain personal histories and reminiscences. These recordings show this later adoption of the Upper Midwest dialect.

The recordings made by Helene Stratman-Thomas and those at the State Historical Library are interesting for their historic and linguistic information. However, these recordings do not capture the full story, and we cannot claim with certainty that Founder Effect took place in Mineral Point. It is hoped that community members will share their stories to help us create a bigger picture of speech in southwest Wisconsin.

Many written histories of Mineral Point and nearby towns are available at UW libraries. To hear the Cornish accent in the Helene Stratman-Thomas recordings, visit Mills Library or listen online: http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/WiscFolkSong/. To listen to the later recordings that illustrate the Upper Midlands dialect, visit the State Historical Library and search for "Mineral Point": http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/.